

Reading Project: Year 7 “The Book Thief”



The book thief dancing with Death

1) Choose a novel

Your teacher will hand out reading samples of each book. Browse through and find out which book you would like to work on!

2) Keep a Reading Diary

As you already know, keeping a Reading Diary is very helpful for discussions, presentations and also for your Matura next year. Please take it seriously and make sure to write down things that are *important* for you.

You should write **three** diary entries:

- One after having read the first chapter of your novel.
- Write a second entry after you have read half of the book.
- The last entry should be written after having finished the novel.

Please do not just write a summary of the book but focus on your thoughts and associations.¹

3) Share your thoughts and get active!

- First, swap your Reading Diaries, share your thoughts and discuss questions.
- Do the tasks distributed by your teacher at home and talk about your answers in class.

Tasks:

→ Character portraits:

The characters in this book are quite complex. Gather information about each of the following characters:

Liesel
Rudy
Hans
Max
Rosa
Frau Hermann

¹ Ideas taken from Elisabeth Pölzleitner (Methodology of Teaching Literature and Culture (Fachdidaktisches PS 4) Handout “Reading Project: Year 5, p. 1)

Make sure to include page references (or at least references to the plot). Compare your notes in the group conferences!

→ Prepare answers to the following questions and discuss them together in class²:

1) Liesel believes that Hans Hubermann's eyes show kindness, and from the beginning she feels closer to him than to Rosa Hubermann. How does Hans gain Liesel's love and trust?

2) - Guilt is a recurring theme in the novel. Hans Hubermann's life was spared in France during World War I, and Erik Vandenburg's life was taken. Explain why Hans feels guilty about Erik's death.

- Guilt is a powerful emotion that may cause a person to become unhappy and despondent. Discuss how Hans channels his guilt into helping others.

- Explain Max Vandenburg's thought, "Living was living. The price was guilt and shame." (p. 208) Why does he feel guilt and shame?

3) Hans Junior, a Nazi soldier, calls his dad a coward because he doesn't belong to the Nazi Party. He feels that you are either for Hitler or against him. How does it take courage to oppose Hitler? Discuss how the Hubermanns demonstrate courage throughout the novel.

4) Describe Liesel's friendship with Rudy. How does their friendship change and grow throughout the novel?

5) How does stealing books from the mayor's house lead to a friendship with the mayor's wife?

6) For us, food is something that we do not have to worry about. During WW II, this was different – especially for poor families like the Hubermanns. Even though they do not have a lot to eat, they share it whenever they can. Discuss the role of food in the novel!

7) How is Hans punished for his obvious non-existing enthusiasm for the Nazi-regime?

8) How does Death describe himself? Why do you think did the author choose him as the narrator?

² Questions 1 – 5 taken from

<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/markuszusak/bookclubcontent.html#discussionQuestions>

9) Many people were not worried about the Nazi-regime in Germany, but for the Hubermanns, it was a constant threat. When were they really in danger because of Nazi-laws?

10) Draw a sociogram for Liesel. Who is close to her? With whom can she speak openly?

4) *Preparing a Presentation*

Prepare an interesting presentation for your colleagues. Make sure that everybody in your group gets their fair share of work!

5) *Project Folder*

Organize everything you have done for this book project including Reading Diary and Presentation material in a folder and hand it in to your teacher.

For teachers:

This book project deals with stories about Nazi Germany or Nationalism in general. The novel for which I have designed exercises is "The Book Thief" by Markus Zusak. It is about a young girl's childhood and youth in Nazi Germany.

Other books that would go along with "The Book Thief" are:

- Anne Frank's Diary (Anne Frank, Mirjam Pressler)
- When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit (Judith Kerr)
- The Wave. The Classroom is out of Control (Morton Rhue)
- The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (John Boyne)

Task 1:

Make copies of the first few pages of each book and hand them out to the pupils. Give them about 20 minutes time to read and then let them decide which book to read. Every student can choose a book, they do not have to decide on one for the whole class.

Task 4:

For ideas on how to present a book see Course Handout Methodology of Teaching Literature and Culture (Fachdidaktisches PS 4), Handout "Reading Project: Year 5", page 2.

Assess the presentations and give constructive feedback after having let the other students comment on each project.